

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL  
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**THE WORKING PEOPLE OF LOWELL  
LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK  
MARY BLEWETT/MARTHA MAYO**

**INFORMANT: ELMER RYNNE**

**INTERVIEWER: PAUL PAGE**

**DATE: JUNE 16, 1986**

**P = PAUL**

**E = ELMER**

**Tape 86.18**

P: My name is Paul Page, and I'm with Elmer Rynne at Lull and Hartford's, and we'll be talking about some of the sports activities in the city of Lowell that you are familiar with. To begin with, could you remember some of the early sport figures in the city? Are there any who were particularly important as far as baseball was concerned?

E: Well my first knowledge of baseball started just at the end of the First World War when I used to be taken to various games both in Forge Village and North Chelmsford. The mill owners were interested in promoting baseball as an activity for the mills. The players didn't necessarily come from the mills for the weekend. They used to bring in professional baseball players to represent people like the [name unclear] and the Abbott Worsted. Many of the players in the league at the time were from the Canadian League. They closed early in Canada, and the players came down here, like Joe Duffy. Eddie Cawley was a great baseball player here. We had a tryout with the [Connie Max] team. This is back in 1917, or 16. The Foye Family, the family had five brothers. They were practically a team in themselves, and they played when they played on the South Common. At the end of the First World War Twilight Leagues started because the mills got out at five o'clock. And the players were local people who played there, and they drew tremendous crowds on the South Common, at times as high as fifteen thousand people. They passed the hat around. Various nationalities played in the leagues, and the French who had a team known as the CMAC were very active in the Twilight League. Well all the players were not necessarily French, but they very active, and they were very active for many years in baseball. The Irish, of course, predominated in numbers as they did in the general population. My knowledge of any Greeks or any other nationalities, the [Skaffs] were Syrian boys who were great ball players, two of whom played in the major leagues. With the arrival back in Lowell 1938/1939 of CYO Baseball, religious groups promoted baseball as a parish activity, but it never reached the ability of earlier

Twilight Leagues in Lowell that were comparable in many to professional Class B Baseball. When the top-notch teams would come from Boston, or from any of the minor leagues, they found it very difficult to overcome any of the teams from Lowell who were right out of the mills, boys out of the mills and out of the workshop.

P: What were some (--) Now the Twilight Teams, what were some of their names? Did they have (--)

E: Well there were the Belvideres, the TR&T's, the CMAC, the East (--) What other teams? I forget now, East Park's or Parkside. There were teams from Shedd Park, or St. Margaret AA had a great team here, represented mostly people from the Highlands. We had an industrial league here with the Courier Citizen, Burbeck's Milk, and teams of that class, which were a step below the Twilight League. Everybody wanted to say they played on the South Common, which was the, this was the Red Sox of Lowell. And everybody, whoever made the South Common considered (--)

P: Yah, Fenway Park?

E: That was the Fenway Park of Lowell. The South Common, to make the South Common. I never made it myself, but there were people who did.

P: What do you mean? What did you have to do to make it there?

E: Well you had to be an excellent baseball player in the first place, and you had to be able to hold your own against some top-notch players. The field was not a dirt field. They use to cover the South Common with a slight glazing of tar to keep the dust down, and it permeated the tops of the field. The ball came down to short stop, or second base, or third base the fastest you'd ever seen. Like playing on the [skin] diamonds down the professional parks with their imitation grass, even faster than that. To play third base on the South Common, you had to have a suit of armor. But it was, every team had its own following. They have the (--) The team I was trying to think of was the South Park's in Lowell. They had people like Jimmy [MacLear], and they had Eddie Gaff, and Cap Crowe, the old St. Peter AA, which was a tremendous team. Every Sunday afternoon the St. Peter's AA would take the field on the South Common, and by 2 o'clock there'd be ten or twelve thousand people there. There was great rivalry between the teams from Centralville, the teams from the South End in particular. They seemed to make up the greater part of what they called Centralville, the "Jersey" side of the city. Then afterwards the [Franco Purtell] played baseball on the South Common for over forty years. He was still playing into the 50s. See his 50<sup>th</sup> year he was still holding down third base. I daresay there was no one at Fenway Park that could cover that third base better than Franco. He got the name Franco because he was French, although he seemed to think he was Irish for some reason or other [chuckles].

P: Now how did people become actual members of these teams? Were there like managers?

E: They all had managers and they belonged to clubs. And as a player developed out of high school and various teams like that, they were selected and they played, and if they did not work out they were unceremoniously dumped. People who played for Boston College, and Harvard, and places like that, we had baseball at the old Spaulding Park. When I was a kiddo the New England League had folded up. The New England League was only a step from the Major League Baseball. The Regans in the Oakland, Petey Regan had played in the American, rather in the New England League with Robert [Morandville], who was a big star afterwards with the Boston Braves. Then Tom Sellers had a professional twilight league out there and drew thousands of people to paid games. And he had outlaw ball players, people who wouldn't sign contracts, people like the Texas League, and they played out there for Tom Sellers. I dare say that I enjoyed watching them more than I would any of the major league teams. They were a real classy outfit. As far as baseball, Lowell was always a great sports city; a great sport city in every sport.

P: Now I don't understand though the importance of sports in general. Like these mill workers would be working all day and then come into the fields and work some more.

E: Well if you don't (--) Why do people get excited about the Celtics? Because it seems to be the nature of people. And Shakespeare in his Seven Ages of Man, or some of the classic writers of the Latin period refer to the four as they refer to it, the classical writers refer to the four ages of man. One the young man being in the arena driving a horse around the arena with the excitement of the crowd. Well the same thing applies in baseball. Everybody wants the chance to excel in a sport and be with his peers. Every sport has the same problem. I had the same problem myself in playing tennis. I would rather win the City of Lowell Tennis Championship than Wimbledon Tournament, if I could have won Wimbledon. Of course I couldn't, but at the same time this is what happens with the Bruins, or the Celtics getting fifteen thousand people on a stormy night to go down to see them play. You got to be a sports fan to appreciate the excitement of winning, and putting it over on someone. The same applies to every sport that we've ever had. Do you want me to say something about the other sports in the city of Lowell?

P: Well one thing that I was wondering is did the different ethnic groups feel as though their own whether pride, or?

E: Oh they had a couple of ball players. There was one Italian who played up on the South Common. They used to call him, John "Bananas". He was an Italian. And why he had his family and his group up there, and he'd have a clique group of fifteen hundred, eighteen hundred every game. You better be nice to him. Attack him gingerly, or you'd have the family on you. Same thing applied in every sport. I mean it was every, baseball, football, basketball. But baseball actually got its start in Lowell as a game for non-working, rather for working people. After the Daylight Savings time came in. Daylight Savings game in 1920. Up to that point the mills worked from sun up to sun own. But when you had Daylight Savings, you got through at 5:00 at night and you got out in the fresh air and go up on the South Common, and buy the newspaper and follow your team. The Massachusetts Cotton Mill had a team, and they all had teams. As far as

baseball is concerned I was never a great baseball fan myself. I was a tennis fan in the city of Lowell having played at high school, at Keith Academy. I played baseball. And the coach at the time was Sunny Griffin. And the man who helped him was Lefty George Tyler, the famous George Tyler of the "Miracle Team" of 1914, who was quite a figure in Lowell. He came originally from Derry, New Hampshire. He pitched the Boston Braves into the world championship. They were in last place on the Fourth of July, they went to win the National League and won the World Series in four straight. He pitched two of them and won both games. He was an outstanding ballplayer. Of course his total salary today wouldn't be what a ball player would get in a week in the major leagues. He worked in a shoe shop here for many years.

P: Do you know, did the mills actively encourage people?

E: The mills not only actively encouraged them, they supported them financially.

P: What do you mean financially?

E: They bought the suits and the balls, and made it available for them to get off a little earlier to get up on the common to get, practice before the game.

P: Now but what, I can't understand why the mills were concerned with doing this?

E: That was labor relationship to keep the people working. Keep them working and get them interested in the Massachusetts Cotton Mill, or the DR and Ts, or the Saco-Lowell Team. They still do it everywhere in the country. They have public relations. I do thousands of dollars worth of people. An Wang is as proud, boasted he supports these softball teams. This is part of the public relations. They were all in those, that was the era of strikes. You kept people happy and they would come up and cheer for the Massachusetts Cotton Team, or the Car Shop Team, or the TRs and Ts, or various teams that were around Lowell. Professional baseball was at Alumni Field. That was the old Spaulding Park, which was a New England League Park, which is what is now Alumni Field down out on Rogers Street.

P: Oh, Cawley Stadium?

E: The Cawley Stadium is the stadium in back. That was the land given by Eddie Cawley to build a stadium, because he was such a great sports fan himself he gave that land for nothing to the city of Lowell. It is almost inconceivable to me not to see the, ever could see the value of keeping a happy group, because softball teams today are all supported by the bar rooms and various groups to keep these people coming into the bar. That's their main focus in life.

P: How about with the people like the CMAC? How are they being funded by their (--)

E: By their own group. The CMAC, that was one of their big activities was baseball. The French were very strong baseball fans. They were always strong baseball fans.

P: So would you say the French and the Irish were the two major baseball groups?

E: I would say that the French and the Irish were the two major, (P: Two major) the two major factors in everything in the city. The Greek people didn't amount to much in the city of Lowell. They did not come here until 1900, and certainly the Greek people were not interested in baseball. It wasn't until people like Lou Athanas and several other people started to play baseball at Lowell High School in the 1920's, that the Greeks became (--) This was the first generation of American-born Greeks; prior to that the Greeks were mostly interested in wrestling, and a few of them in boxing, and some in track and field. Like Jimmy Androumetis, the great Greek athlete. He was on the Greek Olympic team. But they were not interested in baseball. They had no knowledge of the game at all until their own kids came to school.

P: Now who? Jimmy Androumetis?

E: Androumetis. Jimmy Androumetis was a track and field national star in Greece, in the 1904 or 1906 Olympics. I don't know which year it was, and he settled in Lowell, and he was a master of form in the high jump and all the field events. He and my cousin Mike Rynne who was, the bathhouse is named after, were great track and field people before Mike became a swimmer. Mike came into the swimming field mainly to teach the Irish immigrants how to swim. So many of them were drowning in the river and the canals.

P: What? They didn't know how to swim?

E: They did not know how to swim. These Europeans, they never had swimming pools where they came from. Swimming in the Second World War, I worked for Jean Tunney as a physical instructor. I used to see the reports coming out from the Governor after various invasions in the Pacific, and 90% of the casualties were caused by the inability of a person to swim to fifty yards. Now that seems inconceivable today. But after the Second World War schools put in swimming pools and taught people as a condition, required condition to graduate from school; to be able to swim fifty to one hundred yards. It's not something that (--) I remember saying to Wally Burger, the old king of the National League home-run hitter, who was a big star in Boston for many years, and I said "Wally how come you can't swim 50 yards?" He said, "If we had that much water in Arkansas, he said, we'd have fed it to the pigs." That's about what it amounts to with these people. As far as baseball I think that the CYO baseball was a detriment to the development of baseball players in Lowell. Mainly the coaches were interested in the boys as a social and religious thing, but they were sorely lacking in ability as coaches; plus the fact that you were usually held down by the quality of the parish team. You couldn't cross the parish line to bring in another thing to develop an all-star team. Probably the best CYO teams in the city were up in St. Margaret's Parish in Lowell where they had continuous state championship teams every year.

P: So you're saying though with the mills, with the mill teams that they would bring together a pretty good group of different athletes?

E: Oh they would collect ball players from all over. You never knew who was going to be a third base or short stop for the championship game; especially with the Abbotts and the [Silesias] in my youth. And then afterwards we had Tom Seller's professional team. And then there was the team here in the New England League afterwards in the 30s when Vic [LeCourt] built Laurier Park, which is up where the Bourgeois building is now up on Aiken Street. He built his own park. No matter who he brought there he had major league managers and he had ball players from all over the country, they could never seem to beat the CMAC for some reason or other. Vic married a divorced woman, and the CMAC (--) He got right off the altar and married a divorced woman, and he was proscribed. And he wouldn't let the CMAC to use the field. [Unclear] Laurier had a great team. It's just that the CMAC always seem to come out with a team to beat them. The big hero of the French people at that time in baseball was, well the manager was Marcotte, and the big star was Jerry Savard.

P: What year was this around?

E: This was back in 1932 to 38. Savard was probably the greatest all-around athlete that Lowell ever had. He went to Lowell Tech. He started out at Boston College. They tried to make a line man out of him. He ended up going to Lowell Tech, five years up there in engineering, and he played here in Lowell. And he was without a question the best all-around athlete that Lowell ever had. He was a homerun hitter, and he'd steal bases. He was a great football player. He was an outstanding basketball player, he and Eddie Allard.

P: How about in your career have you come across Jack Kerouac for example?

E: Jack Kerouac's father was a newspaper reporter for the L'Etoile, which was a daily French Newspaper owned by the Biron's up on Suffolk Street. And Jack's father was a partner of a fellow named "Scoopy" Dion, Elzear Dion, who was a newspaper reporter and he got the nickname "Scoopy." He was also a member of the Lowell City Council. And Kerouac's father, who had a bulbous nose and quite a protruding stomach, used to cover the football games at Laurier Park every week that we played there. And being a quarterback he seemed to think that I was a big wheel, not realizing that I was one of eleven. And when Jack got through high school where he was quite a football player and track man and various things, the father asked if I would help him to go to school.

P: Help him to go to school?

E: Yah, help him to go to school, get him a scholarship someplace. I finally got a hold of a fellow from Lawrence, Eddy Donohue, who owned the Andover Country Club and who was a great friend of Ralph Hewitt, which is Lawrence's all time all-American who played for Columbia; and at the time was the assistant athletic director down at Columbia. Lou Little was the football coach there. Little came from Leominster, and his

English name was, rather his Italian name was Piccolo. So, but he wanted the name of Little. Anyway, with their help Kerouac got into Columbia. I gave him the ten dollars to catch the bus across the street when the bus terminal was on the corner of Prescott and Central Street. I can still remember him going up the street waving back to me and thanking me for the ten dollars. He was supposed to have gotten a ride in Lowell Trucking. They used to have a terminal in New York, but they called me about 5:00 in the afternoon and said that they couldn't take him because of their insurance. It seems a little (--) To think that ten dollars would be the difference between whether you go to school or not go to school. You got to remember it was in 1940 when ten dollars would save you from the dead. You know, and people were making fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen dollars a week and raising families on it.

P: How did you, how did you ever manage then to get a hold of this Lull & Hartford's Store?

E: Well I always kid my friends by saying the Holy Ghost gave it to me. But to the non-believers I have to tell them the truth. My sister helped me. My sister and I made some money in athletics, and with the result that I was quite friendly with the Hartford's and I ran what they called the Merrimack Stringing Company, Merrimack Valley Stringing Company stringing tennis rackets. And it was a very lucrative business. It maintained me and I made a few dollars in athletics, not too much, but a little. And my sister had some money and (--)

P: Now who would buy tennis rackets? What kind of people?

E: Tennis at the time, in the 19 (--) Woodbury Kiernan was the Superintendent of the Parks in Lowell, he was the father of the Lowell Park System. He looked like Woodrow Wilson, and he got more money than the mayor did. The Park Commission was a separate independent factor in the city of Lowell, and it still is, with their right to sell bonds. I was the Chairman myself afterwards of the Park Commission. But this man was a full-time paid full-time superintendent and he introduced tennis in Lowell. He first built the tennis courts at Shedd Park. He built two on Boylston Street. Then when Shedd Park was rebuilt about 1924, or 1925 Molloy rebuilt it. He built six tennis courts inside the Park, and two on Boylston Street. And that was the beginning. Then he built five courts on Highland Park. He built them on the North Common. He built them in various parts of the city. Now they are to my knowledge, we have more public tennis courts per capita in the city of Lowell than almost any city in the country. It's hard to believe.

**[Tape it turned off, then on again]**

P: ...talking about the man who was creating the tennis courts in the city.

E: Yah, well that was John Woodbury Kiernan. He's the one that built the public tennis courts in the city of Lowell, and he built (--) We had in Lowell a French League. We had the Pawtucketville Social Club in the league, and we had the gang up in the fairgrounds, they had a team, and Shedd Park, and the Highlands. And of course Shedd Park

invariably won everything. The tennis court [start] we got a bigger start on tennis than anybody else did. There's been some tremendously successful tennis players who have come out of Lowell; one of whom was Kendrick Butler. And there was John McLaughlin. There were the Regans, the Douglass', and they are all involved in all the various sports in the city. It was more or a meeting place of different national groups almost than any other sport. Football of course was the big sport in the city of Lowell for many years, and it was all done on a neighborhood basis. I am more familiar with the football than I am the baseball. Football, there were the Butlers, the Indians. The Butlers came from up around [name unclear], down around Moore Street, and they were the power house in the city all through the late 20's all the way to almost 1940. And my cousin, Joe was their big standout, Joey Rynne. Then there were the Indians from outer Gorham Street, and they were very, they went all the way back to the First World War where they were outstanding, used to play the Navy Ship Teams. There'd be a city championship held at the old Spaulding Park, where the various teams would play each other, and it was quite a rivalry. And Laurier Club had a professional team, which I was the quarterback. The bought in players from all over New England, but we had a tough time even with the Butlers. They had such great spirit. Even though they weren't professional football players, or any sport, they really could play ball. So the whole city of Lowell became (--) Well you have to remember foremost, you're talking about a sport, any sport in the city of Lowell, there were very few people that ever went to college. Going to college didn't really start on a big basis. Boston College always had a big group from Lowell. And Holy Cross, people who had a little money went to Holy Cross. And the very wealthy went to Georgetown, of the Irish. (P: Really?) Of the French, the ones who broke away from the cocoon of the French clergy, like the Lavalles, they went to Harvard. And he was quite an athlete, George Lavallee, in every sport. But they were (--)

P: Now was it usually the athletes who made it to college, or did any, everyone? Well I mean (--)

E: People who had no money, who were athletes, made it to college. Like Jimmy Liston and the Romanowskys and people like that. There were people who went to Boston College because, they went there because their families had a little money, or the clergy paid their way for future priests. This is true in most of the Catholic schools. As far as the Yankee element in the Lowell, they went to Harvard, Yale, and they had enough money to go to school and become bankers and lawyers. The people who are lawyers in the city of Lowell who are Irish, or various national groups, all went to evening schools in Boston of which Boston was completely filled. There was Suffolk Law School, and there was Northeastern, and [Portia] Law School. They were all evening law schools, and they became the judges of the city, like Frank Lappin and people like that. Going to college as a regular day student, was very unusual thing until the Second World War when the G.I. Bill supported people. Most of the Catholic schools, like Keith Academy and places like that had very poor math and science departments which cost a lot of money to maintain. So their students, while a few went to Lowell Tech and places like that, very few went up there. In most cases they weren't qualified. **[Tape is turned off, then on again]** Most of the people who went to college to play in college sport were no



great scholars. They were good strong people, but they weren't the great scholars. There were several people who (--) You could count on your left hand the number of people that were from Lowell who became doctors during the twenties and the thirties. And certainly very few of them were from the poorer families. When one considers that the city of Lowell in 1932, every second family in this city was either on welfare or federal relief one way or another in a job. The people who went to Boston College like myself. I played varsity tennis, and varsity track and played one year on the varsity football team as a walk-on, but there weren't anybody else down there playing ball.

P: So sports was one way to advance?

E: It still is. It's the way it is with the blacks today. The Irish were in the same position as the blacks, advancing themselves for their strong backs. The blacks really didn't come into athletics on a big basis. They had the black baseball leagues, but they didn't play in organized ball. So Campanella and the other fellow over there playing for Nashua, then Brooklyn, prior to that the minority of people were Irish, Jewish, Italian, each in turn pushed themselves up. And they pushed themselves up by on the basis of a strong back. And the ones who were exceptionally bright, if someone would help them along, but there were no such thing as school scholarships. As you know today with scholastic attainment, they were very few and far between. We had no state colleges until after (--) We a state college out at the University of Massachusetts who taught farming. It was known as "Mass Aggies." And in 1946 when the soldiers came back from the Second World War, they opened up a state school at Fort Devens. That was the University of Massachusetts at Devens, and the major schools like BU and BC, and Harvard all screeched that the state government was going to spend money on state supported schools in competition to them. It's still going on with Dr. Silber at B.U., screeching all the time about putting that they (--) Out in the west you have land grant colleges, and you have colleges supported by oil in the ground, but here in Massachusetts with direct taxation. An entirely different proposition for people to push themselves up by their physical strength. The facade that colleges use, saying that they are giving these boys a chance, is the biggest laugh in the world, because what they're doing is using these people as professional athletes, to build up their own prestige, or make a lot of money like Boston College making 9 million dollars on Flutie, and giving him a ten thousand dollar scholarship and telling him what a wonderful guy he is. This is farce. The professor down at Brown University said that you should pay them the same as they do professional athletes, as much as they're accomplishing the same thing for the school.

P: You mentioned the Jews. I wonder if they were a force in sports in the city.

E: Not in Lowell, although we did have a fellow named [Aby Ratchin], who was quite a ball player and popular figure. We had one black fellow, and years ago, his name Lou, Bucky Lou, whose sister afterwards became the head of the Art Department at Lowell, and she was valedictorian at Lowell High School, or salutatorian, I don't know which it was, in 1912. We had very few black people in the city of Lowell until the start of the Second World War, when Mrs. Rogers brought them to Lowell to work in the Boott Mill.

P: So what did she try to do there? Keep the unions out, or something?

E: Oh no, no. She brought them in when everybody was gone and they had to have help. It didn't make any difference with the union. One of the biggest strikes we ever had in the city of Lowell was the Boott Mill strike that lasted eighteen months, and it was run by her nephew Roger Flather. Roger Flather, and her name was the same, Rogers and Flather. Flathers originally came from Nashua and bought the Boott Mills in 1902 at a public auction for ten cents on the dollar, and ultimately became a big power in the city of Lowell. But as far as athletics and these people, they never got involved in athletics. Blacks were never a factor in the city of Lowell athletically. We had Falcons here. We only had three or four really black families in Lowell.

P: So could you think of, can you name four of the most prominent sports figures to come out of Lowell? If you could just choose four people who might be you know, the best that the city produced?

E: I would say that I would probably have to name more than four, and I certainly would be passing over hundreds of great athletes. We got to distinguish immediately, which most people don't do between people who played in college, and people who came out of the ranks of the city of Lowell. Steve Sorota who was an outstanding athlete both at Lowell High and Fordham, and dozens of people like Henry Mazur who was a great star of the army, and people like, they were the product of school sport. Now how they would do in local rough and tumble of semi-pro football, or basketball, or baseball, I don't know, because many a great athlete come in here from college.

**Tape I, side A ends**

**Tape I, side B begins**

P: ... a fellow playing baseball in the city of Lowell no matter where he came from. Baseball, I think, went to a higher level in sport than any other sport in the city of Lowell. The finest of the finest of the college athletes would have a hard time holding his own with the local semi-pro baseball players; but as far as football was concerned where the training was longer [words unclear] a little different matter. Many of the good college football players like Joe McArdle who played with the "Seven Blocks of Granite" at Fordham, played Sunday afternoon for the Butlers. And Lowell Tech always had the boys they were being supported up there on the AA for football, like Frankie Niles, and Farrell, and people like that. They played in the locals, and they certainly didn't do any better than the locals. My recollection of a great all around athlete as a kiddo in track, and field, and swimming was my cousin Mike Rynne and Jimmy Androumetis. After them, they were the men who coached Ned Flanagan and Sorota in track. As far as baseball was concerned Eddie Cawley was, in my youth, was one of the really great outstanding baseball players, and baseball fan, and sports figure, the Foye family with the five brothers playing. As far as basketball was concerned, certainly Lou Athanas, who was in "Believe It or Not", one of the greatest scorers of the world, and was an outstanding all around athlete, and also a great basketball player. George [McGuane] was a great outstanding high school football player. My cousin, Joe Rynne, was

probably the greatest running half-back that I ever played against. I put him in the class of some of the great players in the professional football league. Mike Skaff and his brother Frankie were outstanding baseball players, as were hundreds of other great baseball players. Georgie Byam was an outstanding (--) He played, he was the highest paid minor league ball player, and he played more[little] world series than any other baseball player. And even today at almost seventy years old he looks like a man of about thirty-five, the vice-presidents of one of the banks.

P: So people were getting paid to play in the (--) (E: Oh yes) Not for the, not for the twilight, or the (--)

E: Oh yes, in the twilight league they always paid the pitcher a very substantial amount, most of the money coming as it did from passing of the hat on the common, but you know, you've got fifteen thousand people on the South Common. There was a baseball pitcher up there named Eddie Belair that had pitched twice a day. He was, Eddie Belair was, a faster ball pitcher was Bob [name unclear], the pitcher for Detroit. He had a bunch of kids. He worked in the car shops I think, but he was a phenomenal ball player, baseball player. But they got paid. They, not a lot of money, but considering the day if they got \$25.00, \$50.00 it's a lot of money. Most people were making \$14.00 a week.

P: With that many people on the common were there any fights or problems?

E: There was always the suspicion that somebody on the inside was making more money than they should. I could never prove it, neither could anybody else. But it seemed as though the same people always did the collecting, and it was a little suspicious to me. But that's only a guess, and it's a humorous guess. [Comment unclear] But as far as Tom [Seller's] team were very substantially paid. They were paid on a par with men on a AA ball. But we're talking about 1920 to 1930 when a policeman got twenty dollars a week, or probably \$1500.00 a year. And the same man today is getting \$50,000. So how can we make a comparison, you know. I got, the highest I ever got paid for playing ball, I got \$125.00 dollars one afternoon, and my mother thought I stole the bank, robbed the bank. But certainly I played for \$10.00 a lot more times than I paid for \$125.00 certainly; many more times. But (--) Go ahead.

P: I was wondering if there were any fights I would say, during these ball games?

E: They were surprisingly, surprisingly well-kept crowds. We kept crowds, especially in baseball and basketball, and even in football. There were a few rough houses in football as I remember of a period of six, seven years that I played, but not too much. I daresay I heard of more hassles in basketball up the old Crescent Rink than I ever did, because it was a very personal game where we played a different type of basketball than they play today. They played basketball, a two-hand dribble ball inside a netted court. And there were body blocks, and pick-offs, and screens, and it was very rough. There was another game played in Lowell from about 1902 on to the early 20s known as role polo, which was an English game with five men on the side. And all of the French cities, Woonsocket, New Bedford, Fall River, all the mill cities had teams in various towns [A-

Team League]. And Lowell, at one time they showed the game was really so honest, the manager of the Lowell team owned six of his competitors. But it was an outstanding game and they played at the Crescent Rink in Lowell. It was a sellout Tuesday and Friday night without fail. They had the usual mix of a Frenchmen and an Irishman, and the crowd took an active hand in it if they could get onto the court.

P: So how was the game played?

E: The game was played on roller skates in which you rushed to the center court. Instead of doing what they do in hockey, drop the puck between two slashing players, they ran on skates, roller skates, from the net to the center. And he was known as the first rush; first rush, second rush, center, halfback, and goalie. The goalie some nights would make as high as a hundred stops, unlike ice hockey, with twenty or thirty. The scores were 5 to 1, and 6 to 2, and stuff like that. And we were kids, we used to meet the players at the depot. They'd carry their bags down to Duchy Duchesne down at the Crescent Rink and he would give us a complimentary pass. The Crescent Rink in Lowell was the mecca for all sports. There were about 40 bowling alleys there, up and downstairs. Upstairs there was a basketball court, a rollo pollo court, and an organ in which you had skating when there was no game. The bleachers on the side were pulled up on hooks, and you could skate in the whole court. There were no games on Sunday. So they would have roller skating on Sunday and speed skating, and which there was a little betting on the side, illegal betting. Rollo pollo died out. It went out to the west. In my youth my big heroes were rollo pollo players. Bob Hart was the star for the Lowell team. And he, when you made a foul, and you got a free shot at the goal, you wound up like a hockey player with a rollo pollo stick which was similar to a field hockey stick, only flat on both sides. Wound up, and you hit the ball half the length of the center of the court to the goal. And the goalie stood there with a face mask on, and a chest protector like in baseball, and big chin pads like an ice hockey player, and gloves. It was an exciting sport.

P: How did you learn to play tennis?

E: I learned to play tennis. My mother owned a small hotel, a rooming house and Larry Sullivan took me the first time out to Shedd Park when I was about eleven years old. And then there was a woman who lived in the house named Ellen Straw Thompson, whose father was the Governor Straw of New Hampshire, had me taught professionally how to play tennis. And then after I won a the City Tennis Championships several times, I got picked up by a guy named Jim Gilligan who was a teaching pro in Boston, who lived in Wilmington. He was the pro of the famous Edie Sullivan, whose daughter now runs the Avon matches; Edie Ann [unclear]. That's her daughter. And I [unclear] pupil of the gym, Gilligan down at Wilmington five days a week. And he'd put the record player on, on the side of the court and teach us how to glide around the court; never to run, and to glide. He put the "Skater's Waltz" on to hit the ball. You'd hit 500 balls in a row to the same spot. It seemed that way anyway; backhand and a forehand so that you were like a backboard. Some of the way that Chris [Evert - name unclear] was taught by her father Jimmy, who happened to be at one time a good friend of mine. And he came

east in 1940. When I was twenty-eight he was sixteen. And his old [Whiteman] asked me to bring him to a tournament up at the York Country Club. He proceeded to polish everybody off, including two Davis Cups at sixteen years old. So Chrissy [Evert] didn't lick it off the street. But to become a great tennis player, or to become a great, especially a tennis player or golfer, you really have to get an early start. You got to have professional coaching. You got to have people interested in your welfare. Someone has to invest some money in you. You got to have the best records, the best of coaching, and the best of competition. Nobody ever became a good tennis player for a public court overnight, because it's just not possible. The requirements are much too great. And in basketball, most of the great basketball players in the country came off the same course. They come under the [Triborough] Bridge in New York starting out as I said earlier, with the Irish immigrants, then the Jews, then the Blacks, Italians, and now [unclear] Puerto Ricans, [unclear] people like that. But the competition is really what makes an athlete. You can't develop an athlete in a vacuum. Knowing your lack of interest in great sports (--)

P: Actually I'll tell you I do have a tennis background. So that's why I listened to you. I think of my own past, because, well I started when I was young but I didn't have any, certainly didn't have any professional coaching, but I like to play the game. And I think I, you know.

E: Any time that you think you're pretty good, and you've had a great day (--)

P: I always feel that I had a good day. That no matter who I played against, at least I could give them a run for their (--)

E: Well any time you think you've had a great day, and you're going swell, turn the T.V. on and watch Jimmy Connors.

P: Oh I do. Well that's exactly, you know, I realize I'm not like, like them.

E: I mean there are so many gradations in tennis players. A top player in Lowell like myself, when you move into the big league, you just weren't in the ball park. And people say you know, "How did you do with them?" You just don't do, because they have no mistakes in their game. They had no mistakes. And the same in basketball you see people like Byrd playing, you realize your own inadequacies. And you play football and you see somebody 220 pounds running like a kitten. And you know, there are so many gradations in athletes, in athletics and in athletes. The only sport where you can really tell one man against another is in something like track where you run against time. Pat McMahon, who was born in Ireland, who is now a physical instructor on the Lowell School System, when he ran the Boston Marathon he insisted on wearing my shoes to run the run the marathon. I tried to talk him out of it, but the blood ran out of his feet for fifteen miles. Then again, take an old pair of shoes, but he insisted because he wanted to be faithful to me, he ran every one of the twenty five miles under five minutes. When you think of that, most people in high school can't run a five minute mile. He ran twenty-five of them in a row.

P: So your connections in sports help, did it help you along in your, this business?

E: Oh yah, well in this business here, yah when I bought this business I bought it actually in 1936, [unclear] in '36, but didn't pass the papers till March 11<sup>th</sup> in '37. I was then had become 24 years old. I had gotten hurt in athletics. I tore the Achilles tendon off of my left heel against the Providence Steamrollers there at Alumni Field. Rusty Yarnell was the coach, and I never played football after that, but I knew everybody that pulled on a [unclear], tennis, basketball, football and baseball. Probably my weakest sport was baseball, even though I played under Lefty Tyler, I never considered myself any great baseball player. I played quite a bit of it, but no authority on it at all. Buy other sports I played them to a considerable extent, and I played them (--)

P: So it seems then that the past, the sports played a greater role in Lowell in the past than in present. Well what I mean, for example, you don't have (--) Is it the same? Is it the same kind of dynamic do you think?

E: No. For some reason or the other, TV, radio, TV have taking the spark out of sport, local sports. You still have teams, but you don't get the thousands out to watch them because TV why has taken away, the other sport at one time was the only show in town on Sunday afternoon and during the week. So everybody went out. They had their own family. They were interested and they were hoping they've move up in the sport. Today you turn TV on and you watch the greatest players in the world in tennis, football, swim and everything else. Well it's kind of hard to make a comparison between people. It is true in every city in the country. That's why you have so few minor league teams today. At one time every one of the major leagues had five or six minor league teams that they were supporting. They had moved them from league to league like Pawtucket with the Red Sox today. But prior to that they had, the schools had become so strong that you'd get good players out of college teams, and they move into Pawtucket, whereas in the old days they'd play for the three-eye league or the [unclear] leagues Southern Association, or Pacific Coast League. Pacific Coast League was almost just a step in back of the major league. The International League owned by, they had two teams, one in Newark and one in Jersey owned by the two Boston teams, part of the two New York teams, would play a little World Series down there, and draw about 40,000 people. And their teams in any given day would beat any major league teams they were so good. It's a little hard to (--)

P: Are you still following current baseball like (E: Yah, I follow) at Lowell High or?

E: No I don't have quite, (P: Not like that?) nothing like the interest that I used to have. When I was a kid of course I followed Lowell High everywhere. I followed them to their high school games. I am sure there are a lot of people doing the same today. But I like to see kids do well in athletics, and I feel as though they (--) Some of the coaching, not in Lowell, Lowell is very fortunate, but some of the coaching in some of the smaller colleges leave an awful lot to be desired. I don't feel as though the players get (--) Now you have to have a Physical Ed Degree to be a coach, which excludes all of the real good

baseball players. A fellow who played last night, played with the Red Sox, or played with the New York Yankees, who didn't have a Phys Ed Degree wouldn't get a job as a coach at a junior high baseball team if he didn't have a Phys Ed Degree. I don't know what a Phys Ed Degree has to do with him learning how to play baseball, but the facade is always given that that is part of the Phys Ed Program. Big difference altogether between a sports coach and a Phys Ed man. They happen to combine the two of them. One is Health and Recreation in Physical Education, and the other is coaching as a professional, like going to a Trade School and being a coach; a coach in cooking or baseball, but you wouldn't necessarily have to (P: Be a chef) have a chef. (P: You can't use the cook when a chef isn't available) You can use these people. You don't go to the book to look. You've got to have someone who has been in the milieu himself and knows what it is. He could be a damn good cook [unclear] and probably never went to a culinary arts school, or even a culinary arts school which is professional [unclear]. That would be a good place to go. But certainly he wouldn't need an AB in Greek and Latin to be a coach. This is one of the problems today, is that many of the coaches, when they started the Little League here in Lowell a good many years ago, the first meeting was held over at the Rex and I was there. And the Service Club teams (--) The first thing the service club teams, they would buy two hundred baseball hats for themselves. They were all going to be coaches. They all thought they were ball players. Then I happened to mention that Lefty Tyler was over in the square waiting to pick up the Record as he did every night at 10:00, 11:00. And I said, "Why don't we bring Lefty over and he'd probably give you some advice?" One of these [tyros] says, "Lefty Tyler? He's a has-been." I shook my head and mentioned Mike Skaff, and they said, "He new knew nothing about baseball." So this seems to permeate some of the coaching in these leagues for a long time. Although there were some very fine coaches in the Little League, in the [Babe Ruth] Leagues today. Lowell High School, it doesn't necessarily follow a guy, will be a great coach because he was a professional baseball player either. We've had some real dummies in Lowell. The best legion teams we ever had here were back in the 1930's. [Says good night to some woman and jokes with her] Eddie Cawley and [Decky Pond], and these people, they brought Lowell out to the National Championship. In about 1938 the Forge Village Team went on and won the national baseball, semi-pro baseball in Omaha, Nebraska and the same year they won the New England Hockey Championship down the Boston Garden.

P: So one thing that crossed my mind is what happened to the old neighborhood-type groups?

E: The old neighborhood type (--)

P: When did they eventually fall apart?

E: They fell apart I think about I'd say at the end of the, before the Second World War.

P: That makes some sense. All of the guys would be (--)

E: They went away, they were gone, and when they came back TV was on and more money was around. People were getting better jobs. They moved out of the city. Education was rampant then. Kids didn't just go to the mills after the fourth, rather the eighth or ninth grade. The chance for an education would be unbelievable with the GI Bill. Uncle Sam paid everybody's who spent a short time in the service. You didn't have the thousands of people who practically walked the streets as they did in the 30's and the 20's, with no chance other than going up to the Boott Mill or someplace for a job for \$14.40 a week. It's hard to say that to anybody like you at your age, to realize that the city of Lowell when I sold insurance in 1935 for the Boston Mutual Life, [that when the Oakland (unclear) Project] got paid at some specific day at 4:00, you ran around your debit trying to collect the tens and fifteen cents from people to keep them in case they died there wouldn't be a public charges. That's what kept them alive. When Archambault became the mayor of Lowell, the first French Mayor of Lowell, the French-Canadians thought they were going to have first grabs for the public relief. And they found out it was as tough as the nails. [Says goodnight to someone] So they wished they'd have another Irish mayor again. (Laughs)

P: Well you know last time I was here you were mentioning maybe some, either pictures, or articles, or artifacts, or things (E: Yah, yah, I know) that you might be able to find or get together.

E: Oh I know where you can get them. Sure. The Regan family has a very fine collection. [Unclear] Regan, then his son who was the great tennis player, and the father who lived out in the Oaklands, they got pictures there of the old [unclear] the great basketball teams that were here in 1905-06. The scores in those days would be 12 to 10, and 10 to 5. They also played, he was a great baseball (--) He was the one who was with Robert Moranville on the major leagues. He has a tremendous amount of pictures. But that was just a fraction ahead of my time. My knowledgeable times came in you know, at the end of the First World War, you know, when I was a kid. But there are loads of pictures around of people who are, the old timers always talk about them, you know. But Lowell at one time was a great track city, track and field. People don't realize that. We had the Bunting Club in South Lowell, which was an English club. They had their own track. And they'd want great runners like Herb Shrub, great English runner here who ran the first four 12 mile. He used to go out there, and they brought them in from Europe, they'd run. And Fourth of July... not Fourth of July for track, but Labor Day was one of the biggest days of the year here in sports. The South Common would have a big track and field and everybody turned out for it. The thing would last for 2 or 3 hours just in running. The old country people were very, running as they are today. The great runners coming in as they do from Ireland. It's nothing in Ireland to ride on the countryside and see two and three hundred people running along the roads. Long before we had the running craze here at all, I saw it in Ireland. We still bring in Irish runners like [unclear] and people like that here to run, because they don't run just in school in Ireland. That's just another thing. The school element here, people in this country think that as soon as you get through school they say no longer you're an athlete so you stop running. In Europe these people run twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five years old.



P: And they don't rely on automobiles quite as much. They use bicycles. I've seen many elderly people riding bicycles in Europe.

E: Oh, a little old lady in sneakers with a crash helmet almost knocked me over on O'Connell Street in Dublin. But it's true that the runners, they don't (--) Our whole sport element in this country is predicated on school sports today. It was not always that way. [Repeats] It was not always that way. There were many great athletes here who worked in the mills and competed in various ways. One fellow they talked about when I was a kid all the time was Connie Constantineau. He was a baseball player I think, great baseball player from Centerville. It was true of many sports. But when you read about the various national groups in this city, it went on an ethnic basis originally. And as each group moved in we had the original, we had the original English that were interested in track, and the Irish coming in, and of course basketball starting. The YMCA in Lowell, I think it was the second or third largest YMCA when it was founded. And they put in these YMCA basketball courts. And that's where the (--) But prior to that we had the Burkes. Another great group of people that played ball in a city were the Burkes and the PACs, which were Matthew's Temperance Society groups. The Irish were great for Temperance Societies having as they did a little drinking problem. But the Burkes and the PACs, and the Matthew's Temperance Society prior to my day from what I gather, were the great sport groups in the city.

P: What are the PAC's?

E: I don't know what it was. The PAC's I think were the Pawtucket Athletic Club. The Burkes was a Temperance Society named after Fr. Burke. And then the Matthews was after the Matthews Temperance Society. You read a history of the, say the directories of 1865 and 1885, which I had access to, Lowell had a succession of organizations and groups. They had debating societies. The Irish were great for debating societies and public speaking societies as part of the moral and cultural uplift to the Irish immigrants, because of lack of formal education. They had (--) Politicians came out of these debating societies, which was quite true on all Catholic schools. They were always very strong on debating societies and public speaking.

P: Hm, that's interesting. Will I was thinking of, it might have been true. Well I'm wondering if the French were being taught English that much in their schools. Or were they? Weren't they?

E: Well English was a second language for every French kid in this city, a second language. It was a strange Frenchman, including Kerouac, who broke away from the cocoon and went to public schools; which is why people like the like Gerry Savard, and people like that went to the public schools. And the Lavalles, and the Achins, and people like that did very well. I guess the French had two levels of society. They had the upper crust and they had the peasantry, and one lived off the other. And never the twain did meet, not even in marriage. The French poor didn't marry up into the French aristocracy, unfortunately. Like my friend Paul Phaneuf married a girl named Fitzgerald. Louie Eno married a girl name Fitzgerald. And the Irish who had a lot of brains saw

those beautiful French girls and they married them. (Laughs) That was true. That was true, but the French themselves, you know the upper aristocracy like the Pelouins, they married French and they stuck to their own schools. (Repeats) They stuck to their own schools, and they went up to Montreal to school, and they went to Assumption Prep where they spoke mostly French in the old days. So when they're talking about bilingualism today with the Puerto Ricans and everything, it took a long time for the French to really grasp the English language. It was a very unusual (--) I just came from a doctor's office now and there was a woman there in her 70s, an obvious French background, because their accent was more French than English. Beautifully dressed, very refined, very cultured, but they were struggling with that English language.

P: You had mentioned something about Kerouac too the last time. Were you saying that you might have something of his, or?

E: I have a picture of him. My wife, there was a book printed by a guy named McNally out in the Pacific Coast. And another, a fellow come east here and I had him read all of the players on the football team with Kerouac. That's the way I got to know about Kerouac.

### **Interruption**

P: You were just talking about Kerouac and (--)

E: Yah, Kerouac, the biggest thing about Kerouac is why did this French-Canadian kid with what seemed to be the same background of every other French-Canadian kid in Lowell, what motivated him to break out of the cocoon, leave St. Joseph's Grammar School, go to Lowell High School, and have a desire to be a writer? Most French-Canadian kids couldn't spell cat. Well if they could spell it, they spelled it in French. Cat (P: Chat) and it's chat. And then his, you'd have to know his father, his mother who had connections in Nashua. The father was a printer, non-union printer, and how he had run a little newspaper. And he had printed and done a lot of things, but he had this view of being somebody, which was unusual among French-Canadian kids, because if he had that they would have sent him off to Bucksport to become a priest. If he had a sister who had any brains they'd send her off to the convent. There's this kid who was the, just the antithesis of everything that a French parochial school kid would be. Even the people he ended up with. I was talking with Fr. Spike Morrisette the other day and he says he prepared him in death. I said, "God, if there were to pick one guy in the whole world that would have an understanding of what Kerouac's life, the Lord must have sent him there on purpose, to send a guy like Spike Morrisette," you know?

P: I guess we can just end the interview for today.

E: Well I'm sorry I haven't been more informative, but.

P: Oh you've been very helpful. And if there are any other questions we'll just come back.

E: I'll try to get a hold (--) I'll tell you who to call on those pictures.

P: Okay. All right then. Well I have some forms that you can give them if they want, or you can tell me who to call, or tell Paul Marion. Okay. So thank you for the interview.

E: Okay, good luck.

P: Thanks.

**End of interview**